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THOUGHTS OF HOME ;

A SERMON PREACHED ON

ST. ANDREW'S DAY, 1856,

BEFORE THE

St. Andrew's Society,
OF MONTREAL,

BY

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One of the Chaplains of the Society, in the United Presbyterian Church.

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THOUGHTS OF HOME:

A SERMON.

Ps. xlv. 1. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old."

On this Anniversary we meet together to revive our recollections of our fatherland—a country that will ever be embalmed in the hearts of all true Scotchmen—and to draw closer the tie which binds us together in this land, as the descendants of a common country. That a patriotic attachment to the country of one's birth, and a desire to see her advancing in all that constitutes real greatness, is a praiseworthy sentiment, is all but universally admitted; though there are some who have called it in question, not sufficiently distinguishing between a false and a genuine patriotism. It is quite possible to be devotedly attached to our own country, without assuming a defiant attitude towards any other; and to uphold her honour, without undervaluing or disparaging the excellencies of other peoples and races. It is in this spirit, I doubt not, you meet here to-day. While you look back with fond affection to that country which gave you birth, and extend a warm greeting to every brother Scotchman, you do not exclude from your fraternal regard the descendants of those allied countries, England and Ireland, which, together with Scotland, form the triple confederacy of Great Britain—the "three-fold cord" that binds and sustains the British Throne and Constitution. Nor do you forget the race that inhabit this Province along with you—the descendants of a people whose glory has been immortalised by the pen of the historian, and who have

now this additional claim on our regard, that they are closely united with us by national treaties. We may be patriotic without fostering sectional prejudices and antipathies; we may love and praise our own country, without seeking to detract from the merits or greatness of any other.

There was a time when faithfulness to God was identified with attachment to country, and the Israelite who did not remember the land of promise with special affection, and even "prefer it above his chief joy," was justly looked upon, not only as a traitor to Jewish interests, but to the cause of God in the earth. And the feeling is a holy one still; it has its place amongst the things that are "lovely and of good report"; nay, that man seems to us to labour under a fatal defect of character who is destitute of it. Certain we are that he who has no country to which he can look as his own, and fondly say, "this is my own, my native land," is a stranger to at least one source of pure and hallowed enjoyment, and shuts out from his heart one sentiment that might prove a powerful incentive to good and worthy deeds.

There are many reasons, brethren, why we should cherish an affectionate remembrance of Scotland. I might refer, for example, to the *country* itself. It is true, it may seem rugged when compared with some other lands; its climate less kindly, and its fields less fertile; but it possesses this indescribable charm, that it is *our own*. The fields and "braes" where we sported in youth, listening to the song of the lark in the sky, or the "mavis" or blackbird in the grove; the clear murmuring streams by which we wandered; and the distant mountains on which we gazed, watching the shadows of the clouds as they seemed to chase one another over their brow; and a thousand scenes of a similar kind, are all clothed in our fancy in colors with which no other scenery can compare, and awaken emotions that no other can produce. There is no sunshine like that of our youth; no summer days now seem half so sweet, nor pleasures half so gay. It is true that all this is to be ascribed to the power of early associations, but it is not the less a

reality to us ; and it connects a resistless attraction, as well as an exquisite delight, with our recollections of "lang syne." A classmate of my own has expressed the same sentiment in the following immortal lines. Speaking of Albion, this celestial bard says :—

"Nor do I of that isle remember aught
Of prospect more sublime and beautiful,
Than Scotia's northern battlement of hills,
Which first I from my father's house beheld,
At dawn of life ; beloved in memory still,
And standard still of rural imagery.
What most resembles them, the fairest seems,
And stirs the eldest sentiments of bliss ;
And pictured on the tablet of my heart
Their distant shapes eternally remain,
And in my dreams their cloudy tops arise."—POLLOCK.

But from the country let us pass to its *inhabitants*, the *people*, in whom of course the chief interest centers. Looking back on the domestic scenes which we once witnessed, the happy meetings, and the fond companionships of former days ; we are sometimes tempted to suppose that the common people of Scotland were kinder, and more hospitable in their disposition ; more ardent in their attachments ; and more simple and unsophisticated in their manners, than those of most other countries. Though the influence of fashionable life has been long felt in the higher classes, the tendency of which seems to be, to destroy all distinctive national character, and produce an artificial, heartless uniformity ; yet that influence has never extended to the people at large. Or, if it has been more felt in the cities, it has not corrupted the simplicity of the rural parishes and villages ; and it is there, more especially, that what is characteristically Scottish is to be sought for. There, there was no class-exclusiveness ; no haughty, ceremonious reserve ; but neighbor lived with neighbor in the interchange of good offices, and the cultivation of mutual confidence and esteem. There—

"Maidens and men, in strath and in glen,
Aye welcomed us in as their ain folk."

And we venture to affirm, that this cordial amity, this national brotherhood of feeling, has done more than, perhaps, anything else, to produce the strong attachment to country, by which the Scotch have been long distinguished; and to awaken in them an affection for their fatherland, which neither distance of place nor of time can eradicate.

But, referring to the Scottish people, we are reminded that there are many among them, with whom we may well be proud to claim any connection this day. For there are Scotchmen who have distinguished themselves in all the various departments of learning, and indeed in every enterprise or pursuit that can lead to honor. The statesmen, warriors, jurists and philosophers that Scotland has produced are known in the history of the world. Her contributions to astronomy, geology, mathematics, mental and moral philosophy, medical science, and the applications of science to the arts and the wants of civilized life, have all been such as to give her an honorable position among nations. Her poets and historians are universally known; her sons have fought in every battle; her ships are found on every sea; her merchants in every land. It was said by Curran, with no less truth than eloquence, that, "Scotland pursued her eagle flight against the sun of every science, with an eye that never winks, and a wing that never tires." The list of her scholars and great men is so large, that it would occupy too much time even to mention them. And when it is considered that the country is so limited in extent and population, it will be admitted, we think, that it redounds highly to her honor; and that it betokens something peculiarly good either in the Institutions of Scotland, or the "*perfervidum ingenium*" of her sons, that she has sent forth so many who have rendered themselves famous in the world. I do not mention these things in a spirit of boasting, nor with the design of throwing any disparaging reflection upon other countries, or the deeds of their heroes or scholars; but rather to remind you that we have no cause to be ashamed of

our own country;—that, on the contrary, there are many reasons why we should glory in our connection with it, and keep up the remembrance of it, as we do this day; and also to stir up you, the descendants of Scotchmen in this Province, to emulate the example of those great and good men, to whom you can look, with honest pride, as your ancestors and countrymen.

But I hasten to observe that the *religious* element enters largely into the national Scottish character. I do not mean that every Scotchman, or any Scotchman, is religious by national descent; there have been as deplorable manifestations of human depravity in that country as, perhaps, in any other; and a Scotchman, without the grace of God, is as bad as any other man: still I do mean that the true Scottish character is essentially a religious one; and that the Scotch, as a people, are as well known as the Puritans of New England, for their stedfast adherence to certain religious opinions. It is the religion of Scotland that has made Scotland what it is. Her history for the last three hundred years has been a religious history; and the man who has not some knowledge of religious doctrines and questions, and some sympathy with religious struggles, can neither understand that history, nor the genius of the Scottish people.

The doctrines of the Reformation were early introduced into Scotland, and were more generally received by the nation at large, and took a firmer hold of the national mind and conscience, than in most other countries. The doctrines of the Westminster standards, as you are well aware, are those which Scotland received, and which she bound herself, by national compact, to maintain. Freedom of conscience; liberty to read the Word of God, and to draw from that pure and infallible source all that is comprehended in *religion*, both as to doctrine and practice; the rejection of human authority, and of all post-apostolical precedents and traditions; and a firm adherence to the pure apostolic faith and discipline, as

taught in the Inspired writings ; these are the leading points in the religion of Scotland. Whatever opinion persons may form of the merits of these points, it cannot be denied that Scotland embraced them with the greatest zeal. This fact underlies the whole of her history since the Reformation. For this religion she fought with a fervor and enthusiasm of which it is scarcely possible for us to form any conception at the present day. For this she unfurled the banner of the Covenant, and gave some of her best sons to die in martyrdom ; of which we now and then meet with an affecting memorial still, in the gray cairn, in some upland moor. The firm hold which this religion took of the minds of our forefathers, and the dire struggle which they sustained in its defence, have contributed very powerfully to mould the national character, and determine the nature of our national Institutions. And it admits not of a question, that to that struggle we are indebted for much of the liberty, both civil and religious, that we enjoy at the present day.

We feel grateful to God that he brought our forefathers triumphantly through such an arduous struggle, and that our native land was the theatre on which the battle of religious liberty was so successfully fought. We ascribe their triumphs to his " arm and countenance ;" yet we can recognise, at the same time, some subordinate causes that contributed materially to the happy issue of the struggle, and to mature and consolidate its results. It may be doubted whether the cause of the Reformation would have been able to maintain its ground, if it had not been early taken under the protection of the civil power. For whatever opinion may be entertained, in the present condition of society, of the lawfulness or expediency of any connection between the Church and the State, yet in those times, when all questions were decided by an appeal to the sword, we cannot see how the ark of our liberties could have been preserved without it. We must ascribe, therefore, very great importance to the part which the Church of Scotland acted in those times

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of trouble ; when, in the warmth and virgin purity of her first love, she lifted up her testimony for Christ's cause, and the Covenant of Scotland. Nor must we forget to mention, with almost equal praise, the powerful auxiliary which the Church raised up, in the early establishment of Parochial Schools. These gave permanence to the work of Reformation ; these gave a lodgment to the doctrines of the Reformation, in the minds of the Scottish youth, so firm, as to bid defiance to all attempts to displace them. Yes, it is one of the peculiar privileges of Scotland, that there is a school in every parish, and the Bible and the catechism in every school. With these the whole youth of Scotland are made familiar at an early age ; under these influences they grow up, and their characters are formed and fixed for life. And if there is any religious element in the Scottish character, any power of appreciating what is good and true, or steadfastness in adhering to it—which we think all impartial judges will allow—we hesitate not to ascribe them, under God, to the school system of Scotland, in which the Bible and the catechism occupy a most conspicuous place.

Looking back to that country, from this land in which we now dwell, I see nothing there which I envy more, or which I am more desirous to see transplanted to these shores, than her Parochial School-system. Frequently have I wished that we had the same system in operation here, where every thing is so loose and unsettled, and men's opinions are as shifting as the sand. Sometimes I have hoped that my wish would yet be realized, and that the Scottish population in this city would unite in raising and maintaining a **ST. ANDREW'S SCHOOL**, upon the model of the Parochial Schools of Scotland ! What an invaluable boon would this be to future generations ! How different in quality the education they would receive there, from the flimsy, non-religious, if I should not rather say, anti-religious education, which is so common in this part of the Province ! and how different the influence of such an education, in their after-life, both upon themselves and Society !

It becomes us, on such an occasion as the present, while rejoicing in all the goodness which God hath shown to our Fathers and our Country, to give thanks unto Him ; remembering that if Scotland differs from other countries, in any respect that redounds to the advantage or the honour of Scotchmen, it is He "that maketh us to differ." And while we glory in our connection with that country, let us be careful to follow the footsteps of our Fathers. Like them, let us be a Bible-loving and a God-fearing people ; while we have no cause to be ashamed of our country, let us so conduct ourselves, that our country shall never have cause to be ashamed of us.

In this Province we enjoy many liberties and privileges ; in some respects our civil privileges are greater than even those of our countrymen in the fatherland. Here we have no privileged classes, and but little of that class-legislation which falls so heavily on all but the favoured few. Our connection with the empire of Great Britain is so close, as to secure to us many of the rights of British subjects, and yet it is rendered so easy, as to admit of an exemption from many of their burdens. Looking at our neighbours in the great Republic on the South, we see nothing to envy in their condition ; but rather find cause to congratulate ourselves on our better position, and broader and firmer liberties. It used to be cast upon Canadians as a reproach, that the state of things on this side of the Province line was so different from the South ; but, for some years, their liberties have been suffering a process of abridgement, while ours have been steadily enlarging ; so that now we have no cause to shrink from such a comparison.

Moreover, it is our happiness to live under the reign of one of the best Sovereigns that ever swayed the British sceptre. Raised while a mere girl to the throne of one of the greatest empires in the world, she has conducted her administration with the wisdom of a Nestor. A pattern of justice and

queenly dignity on the throne, and of matronly purity and grace in the domestic circle, she is one to whom the proudest peeress, and the poorest peasant in the land, may equally look for an example. Brethren, while we are thankful to God this day, for all that he has done for beloved Scotland in past times, and is doing still, let us never forget, that the presence of such a Sovereign, on the British throne, at such a crisis as the state of Europe now presents, is one of our chief public blessings! I feel persuaded that none will pray more fervently than Scotchmen, that God may long preserve Queen Victoria, and prosper her reign!

After the example of the inspired Apostle, who thus wrote in the spirit of the purest patriotism, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God, for Israel, is, that they may be saved"; let us pray that, not only our countrymen according to the flesh, but our brethren of mankind at large, may enjoy the grace and favor of God; and ever follow that religion which "hath the promise both of this life and of that which is to come." *Amen!*



